

OSPAR Commission's Work on the Arctic Marine Environment

[OSPAR](#) is the mechanism by which 15 Governments and the European Union cooperate to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic, including marine areas beyond national jurisdiction. Its mandate is set out in the OSPAR Convention, which places a general obligation on its Contracting Parties to take measures to tackle pollution and protect the OSPAR Maritime Area against the adverse effects of human activities. The maritime area covered by the OSPAR Convention is set out in the figure below.



Figure 1: OSPAR Maritime Area. Region I: Arctic Waters; Region II: Greater North Sea; Region III: Celtic Seas; Region IV: Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast; Region V: Wider Atlantic. Credit: OSPAR Commission.

The Arctic Outcomes Working Group (AOWG) was established in 2022 to deliver the OSPAR Commission's 2022-2025 Arctic Outcomes Roadmap. This Roadmap sets out the steps considered necessary to support the OSPAR Commission's commitment to protect the Arctic marine environment in the OSPAR Maritime Area.

The OSPAR Commission and its North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2030

OSPAR has five thematic work areas, namely the protection and conservation of marine ecosystems and biodiversity, hazardous substances and eutrophication, radioactive substances, offshore industries (which, for OSPAR, relates to oil and gas industries) and the environmental impacts of

human activities (which includes for example marine litter, underwater noise, and offshore renewables). OSPAR's work is guided by the ecosystem approach to an integrated management of human activities in the marine environment.

The [North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy \(NEAES\) 2030](#) is the means by which OSPAR's Contracting Parties implement the OSPAR Convention until 2030. It is based around four themes: clean seas; biologically diverse seas; productive and sustainably used seas; and seas resilient to climate change and ocean acidification. The Strategy emphasises the importance of regional cooperation in ensuring the effective protection and sustainable use of the seas and that OSPAR will continue to play a leading role in addressing global ocean issues. The implementation of the Strategy will help OSPAR to deliver its vision of a clean, healthy, and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic Ocean which is productive, used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification. It is part of OSPAR's contribution to the achievement of the [United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and its [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

2022-2025 OSPAR Arctic Outcomes Roadmap: Process

At the last OSPAR Ministerial meeting, which took place in 2021 in Portugal, OSPAR Ministers signed the [Cascais Ministerial declaration](#), which *'[...] recognises the unique biodiversity of the Arctic, part of the OSPAR maritime area and commit to protect the Arctic marine environment, including through collaboration with other relevant organisations, such as the Arctic Council and the International Maritime Organisation.'* This Declaration supports the relevant objectives under the North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy, including those concerning area-based conservation measures such as marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs).

Following this Declaration, the OSPAR Commission met in June 2022 and adopted a 2022-2025 Roadmap to support the delivery of this commitment. The Commission also established the Arctic Outcomes Working Group (AOWG), which is tasked with the implementation of this Roadmap. The first meeting of the AOWG took place in October 2022 and considered how to approach and contact relevant stakeholders for potential future engagement as well as identified sources of scientific information and traditional knowledge on the marine environment in the Arctic. The main focus of this initial exercise was to identify reports that synthesise information and knowledge on pressures, current and planned activities, and existing management and conservation measures; but other relevant sources of information and knowledge were also welcome. An information session was organised on 28 November 2022 to inform stakeholders of the OSPAR Roadmap process and to gather initial feedback on the information gathered to date.

Stakeholders are invited to provide further relevant scientific information and traditional knowledge on the Arctic marine environment that can inform the OSPAR process. This information will be compiled and initial ideas for OSPAR measures and actions in the Arctic marine environment in the OSPAR Maritime Area will be developed and reviewed at the OSPAR Commission meeting in June 2023. A workshop will be organised in summer 2023 to present to stakeholders the evidence and case for the proposed OSPAR measures and gather their feedback to further inform the OSPAR process. In

light of these discussions, the proposed OSPAR measures and actions will be further developed in 2024, with the aim of their adoption at the OSPAR Ministerial Meeting in June 2025.

Scientific information and traditional knowledge gathered to date

The OSPAR Secretariat has so far received a total of 146 contributions from OSPAR Contracting Parties and permanent observers. The information collected to date comes from a range of different institutions, including regional organisations (such as OSPAR, the Arctic Council Working Groups, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, and the European Union), intergovernmental bodies (such as IUCN, IPCC, and IPBES), United Nations bodies, national agencies, non-governmental organisations, and research institutes. Several peer-reviewed scientific articles have also been suggested. It covers a variety of different topics related to the Arctic marine environment, including current or planned activities (such as fisheries, shipping, oil and gas, marine tourism, and bioprospecting), issues related to impacts on the marine environment (such as pollution, contamination or climate change), considerations related to ecosystem assessments and biodiversity conservation, and reports on traditional knowledge.

Next Steps

The AOWG welcomes stakeholders' feedback, inputs, and suggestions on further scientific information and traditional knowledge that should be considered in this process. Stakeholders are invited to review the [scientific information and traditional knowledge gathered to date](#) and send relevant additional information to the OSPAR Secretariat (Barbara Middleton, Barbara.Middleton@ospar.org) **by 15 February 2023**.

The second meeting of the AOWG is planned for 23 January 2023. A workshop will be organised in summer 2023 to present to stakeholders the evidence and case for the proposed OSPAR measures and gather their feedback to further inform the OSPAR process.

For more information: OSPAR Commission: <https://www.ospar.org/>